

**PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS
TO THE 2009 UBCM CONVENTION**

Honoured colleagues and guests, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities' 2009 Annual Convention.

Acknowledgement Of New Local Governments

I would like to extend a special greeting to UBCM's new members: Tsawassen First Nation, Nisga'a Village of Gitwinksihlkw and the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality. Let's give a warm UBCM welcome to Chief Councillors Kim Baird, Peter Lambright, and Regional Councillors Kim Eglinski and Doug Roper.

Acknowledgement Of New Mayors And Councillors

A special welcome as well to the 40 % of you who are attending your first UBCM Convention. We are glad to have you with us and appreciate your readiness to serve your community – welcome to each of you!

Acknowledgement Of Colleagues

I would also like to extend a word of appreciation to my colleagues in Kelowna and the Central Okanagan Regional District who provided support over the past year as I fulfilled the duties of President. I also want to acknowledge the loss of a dearly beloved colleague, Councillor Brian Given, whose death has touched all who worked with him.

Acknowledgement Of Past Presidents

There is one other group that we should we should acknowledge today, and that's the Past Presidents of UBCM. They have been instrumental in building the foundation for our current successes. To take but one example, the opening of Local Government House in Victoria is one of the highlights from this year. The genesis of Local Government House in many ways reflects the close relationship between Frank Leonard and Murray Coell. We have many of our Past Presidents with us today; I would invite you to stand – let's show them our appreciation. I also want to say a word of thanks to Past President Susan Gimse who steps down this year after a decade of continuous service.

Introducing the Theme:

In recognition of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the theme of this year's Convention is "Province of Champions". Now, some may think is a bit of stretch to connect the Olympics to the work of being local government politicians, but to such skeptics I submit the following:

- Like hockey, winning at the local level requires a team effort.
- Like free style skiing, there are bonus points for improvisation.
- Like short track speed skating, the occasional elbow comes in handy.
- And like the luge event, if you are afraid of crashing, you should probably stay at home and watch it on TV!

The Inspiration That Athletes Provide

There is also one other connection, though – one that is closer to our motivation in choosing the theme. For two weeks in February, Canadians will be glued to the TV watching the games. Part of the Olympic's attraction is that it overwhelms our typical Canadian reserve. We don't often beat our chests as Canadians, but if we get less than gold in men's hockey, call out the reserves!

Beyond our feelings of national pride, though, we are captivated by the games because the athletes inspire us. Consider speed skating. The best skaters in the world can cover a thousand metres in 67 seconds. To do that, it takes years of training and competition, with a total focus on improvement through small steps. The connection to our work as local government leaders is clear. Completing the projects and delivering the programs that sustain our communities is hard work. It requires paying attention to a thousand small details and persevering - not just for a few days or a few weeks, but years. And, sometimes even with years of hard work, the outcome of all our efforts is less than what we hoped for. It takes an enormous amount of work merely to have the *chance* to be successful.

So that's why we watch – we see a reflection of our own effort in their effort. And that inspires us as local leaders to stay focused, to commit, and to do the hard work that it takes to develop healthy, vibrant communities.

Infrastructure Stimulus And Building Canada

So, consider what I have to share with you in this year's address as an update on our collective efforts as the Union of BC Municipalities. My last update to you was at the area association meetings in the spring. As you may recall, UBCM's main priority at that time was securing a local government share of the new funding for infrastructure announced in the 2009 federal budget.

Throughout the spring and summer, UBCM continued our conversations with federal and provincial officials. When we came to the conclusion that the process was stalled, we prepared a news release to state our issues. We made two points. First of all, despite the stated goal of fast delivery to stimulate the economy, little of the promised funding had been committed. Second, we wanted to ensure that a portion of stimulus funds would flow to local government priorities.

As many of you will know by now, last Thursday I joined the Premier and Federal House Leader Jay Hill to announce the delivery of the remaining Building Canada Funds, the top-up promised in Budget 2009, and a portion of the stimulus funding. The result was the delivery of more than \$300 million in new federal – provincial funding. In total, 141 new projects for local priorities were announced.

Based on the numbers that we saw in the provincial Budget Update, the amount of funding for local government projects could have been much less. It is the opinion of the Executive that our efforts on this file represent a big win for local governments in BC, and I hope you share that sentiment as well.

Strategic Community Investment Funds

Local government funding was a concern for UBCM in other ways this year.

In February we communicated with you regarding the Strategic Community Investment Funds. The Province had come to UBCM with a proposal to restructure the existing small community, regional district and traffic fine revenue sharing programs. In essence, the repackaging will deliver the funding that local governments anticipated receiving through these grants up to the 2010/2011 fiscal year on an accelerated basis. Given what we were hearing about provincial revenues, executive supported the proposal because it secured funding through the next two years.

In return for early delivery, the province asked for some new reporting requirements. Previously these transfers were unconditional, and for some members, these conditions were unwelcome. When we consider the wide-ranging cuts in the provincial Budget Update, though, it appears that we chose the right course. While there were cuts in many other areas, local governments retained their funding.

Fiscal Tools

Let me touch briefly on the issue of fiscal tools.

At last year's convention, we passed a motion that invited the province to participate in a joint working group on local government finance. The province has indicated to UBCM that this issue is not a priority at this time. The provincial response reflects their opinion that UBCM needs to make the case before they will collaborate on this issue. UBCM will take up the challenge that has been presented, and undertake research on this issue after convention. We will also provide an update on the issue at the area association meetings in the spring.

Industrial Taxation

One of the hotter files that we are tracking presently is the taxation of industrial properties.

The province's 2009 Throne Speech called for discussions with UBCM regarding light and industrial property assessment classifications. UBCM's policy base on this matter is quite clear: all individuals and corporations have a right to appeal their assessment and influence public opinion through appropriate channels – but it is not within the purview of any person or corporation to arbitrarily determine their own level of taxation!

Like many of you, the Executive has been awaiting court decisions from the six cases that are now before the courts. Important resolutions will be coming forward on this matter in our session later today to clarify the process for UBCM's discussions with the Province.

We know this issue is critical for communities with resource-based economies, and look forward to the direction that your decision will provide. We also fully understand that there is a basic principle at stake here with the potential to impact all local governments in BC.

Regional District Taskforce

I also want to update you today on the work of the Regional District Taskforce. Let me say off the top that we have received excellent advisory support from the Province on the Taskforce. Their work with us since the MOU was signed at last year's Convention is deeply appreciated.

If you have not yet read the progress report included in the pre-Convention material, I encourage you to do so. In the time available today I want to outline the key findings and issues to date.

The most important lesson learned by the Taskforce is that as a whole, the RD system works well and does not require major modifications or radical solutions. There is, however, a need for greater understanding of the tools currently available, along with the refinement of some existing tools and the creation of others.

Based on the feedback received through the consultation process, three key priorities have surfaced that require further work. In a nutshell, they are:

- The need to clarify jurisdictional authority between local governments and the Province to make effective land use decisions;
- The need to improve fringe area planning through vehicles such as joint committees or the cross-acceptance of bylaws; and
- The need to encourage logical service partnerships between municipalities and electoral areas.

A final report will be delivered to the UBCM Executive and the Province by January, and we will communicate with you shortly afterward to share the findings.

Green Communities Committee

I also want to reference some recent progress towards clarifying climate action definitions. To date, 176 local governments have signed charters, proving a strong endorsement of the Province's ambitious plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Back in the spring, the Green Communities Committee released a draft definition of the corporate operations that will be included in the carbon neutral commitment of local governments.

A workbook has recently been posted on the Climate Action website to introduce the definition and provide guidance to local governments for testing it. I want to personally encourage all local governments that are currently recording data related to carbon outputs to test the definition and provide the committee with feedback on the proposal. Log on to the Climate Action toolkit for more information.

Local Government Leadership Academy

Off the top, I referenced the fact that there was more than a 40% turnover in the last local government election. That figure is not an anomaly; the percentage is about the same for every local government election over the last two decades. High turnover is just one of the reasons why UBCM joined with our partners in developing the Local Government Leadership Academy.

This past year the LGLA rolled-out an ambitious series of seminars with six events taking place in four regions of the province. The record attendance levels and the high

scores in your evaluations confirm that the time and expense of providing these programs is a good investment. Stay tuned for more information on new offerings that will be forthcoming in June 2010.

Philippines Mission And Area Associations

In addition to travel to the LGLA sessions, my work as President also took me to our partner organizations in the Philippines, to all five area association meetings and to the opening of Northern Rockies Regional Municipality. The result of these travels, as well as others with the BC Caucus of FCM has been a year of rewarding conversations with you and our colleagues across Canada and in other parts of the world. This aspect of the work has been deeply enriching.

Appreciation For 3 Ministers

On a closing note, I want to express UBCM's appreciation for the work of Ministers Blair Lekstrom, Kevin Kreuger, and Bill Bennett. Three Ministers of Community and Rural Development in a single term of a UBCM President has made for more hellos and goodbyes than one would hope for. Nonetheless, the Executive has appreciated how quickly each of these Ministers brushed up on the files that pertain to UBCM and their availability for discussion.

We also appreciate the close relationships that each Minister has formed with the local governments in their constituency, either by their direct experience or simply by staying close to local issues. Thanks to their combined leadership, we have felt that UBCM has had a strong advocate for local government issues in cabinet, for which we express our thanks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am proud to stand with you today because of the tremendous work that you are doing in your communities - from Port Edward to Vancouver, from Port Hardy to Sparwood.

BC is indeed a "Province Of Champions", not least because of the achievement of its hard working local government leaders. For everything that you do on behalf of your communities, I want to extend my thanks and appreciation.

We now begin the work of the 2009 Convention, to chart our way forward and form the policies that will guide our actions as the Union of BC Municipalities.